

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
PENNSYLVANIA

COMMITTEES
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HEALTH, EDUCATION,
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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
JOINT ECONOMIC

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2010

The Honorable Lisa Jackson
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building, Mail Code: 1101A
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Jackson:

As you know, natural gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale region is a major issue for many towns and communities throughout Pennsylvania. The opportunity to develop our own natural resources has led to job creation, strengthened our state economy, and reduced our dependence on foreign energy. However, despite its many benefits, natural gas drilling presents a concern for the people living near these drilling sites. Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) involves the use of sometimes toxic chemicals that are injected underground, often in close proximity to underground sources of drinking water. It is the highly variable and unpredictable nature of the process that can lead to the contamination of ground water and drinking water that is of great concern to me.

Every day I hear from Pennsylvanians who worry about their future access to safe drinking water. The protection of underground water sources is especially important to Pennsylvania because we have the second highest number of private drinking water wells in the Nation; three million Pennsylvanians are dependent on private wells to provide safe drinking water to their homes.

Therefore, I urge EPA to examine its authority to determine whether it can take additional steps in Pennsylvania to investigate and respond to groundwater contamination and other potentially harmful consequences of drilling. I request a meeting with you and appropriate EPA officials to discuss natural gas drilling and whether EPA could launch an investigation into water and environmental contamination. Further, I wholeheartedly commend EPA for undertaking a congressionally mandated study on hydraulic fracturing, and note that the initial information I have seen on the scope of the study is encouraging. I would also hope to speak with Science Advisory Board officials during the requested meeting in order to have the opportunity to discuss the scope, timing and methodology for the study and to ensure that EPA addresses all issues critical to Pennsylvania.

The reasons for requesting greater EPA involvement in Pennsylvania are many. Recent incidents in the State raise the question of whether the necessary steps have been taken to protect Pennsylvania families and communities against the detrimental side effects of drilling. For example, methane gas has infiltrated the private drinking wells of 14 families in Dimock Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. The intrusion has contaminated the underground source of drinking water and reduced property values in the area. Several drinking water wells have exploded due to a suspected buildup of natural gas, and many wells have been found to contain so much natural gas that one homeowner was advised to open a window if he plans to take a bath.

In September 2009, there was also a surface water contamination incident in the same area. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), between 6,000 and 8,000 gallons of hydraulic fracturing fluid leaked from a pipe at a drill site and contaminated the surrounding area and a wetland in Susquehanna County. There were two separate spills on the same day. The first spill in the afternoon leaked 25 to 50 barrels of hydraulic fracturing fluid and the second spill in the evening leaked 140 barrels.

In regard to the underground water contamination with methane, Pennsylvania DEP recently executed a consent decree and agreement that Cabot Oil & Gas Corporation failed to adequately protect the affected homeowners in Susquehanna County and must take further steps to remedy the situation. DEP fined Cabot \$240,000, ordered the plugging of three wells believed to be the source of the contamination, prohibited drilling by Cabot for one year in the vicinity and required Cabot to install permanent water treatment systems in the affected homes. While the no-drill zone may put a damper on Cabot drilling in the Dimock area, the area designated by DEP accounts for only about 5,700 acres, about 2.9 percent, of the company's nearly 200,000 acres under lease in Susquehanna County. I commend DEP for taking action, but I remain concerned that the current status of Federal and State oversight of gas drilling may be inadequate to protect families living in close proximity to drilling activities.

In addition to the incidents in Susquehanna County, there have been other contamination events across Pennsylvania. For example, I understand that EPA is scheduled to test contaminated underground water in Washington County and that residents have spoken with an EPA investigator. I know that Pennsylvania has been permitting and managing natural gas development with the paramount goal of protecting the environment and public health. I commend the State DEP for taking steps to strengthen its regulations regarding drilling, and adding additional DEP staff to assist with the increased interest in gas drilling in the state. However, I again request that EPA continue to investigate and respond to water contamination in order to protect human health and the environment.

I believe it is important to protect the health and safety of Pennsylvanians as we further develop the Marcellus Shale. For this reason, I introduced the Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals (FRAC) Act, S. 1215, that would require that hydraulic fracturing be regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, ensuring that a consistent set of Federally enforceable regulatory requirements are applied to the development of our

natural gas resources. The FRAC Act would also require that the natural gas industry provide complete disclosure of the chemical composition of its hydraulic fracturing materials to ensure that if drinking water supplies, surface waters, or human health are compromised, the public and first responders will know exactly with what they are dealing. I view this as a simple matter of citizens having a right to know about any risks in their community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to continue working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Casey, Jr." in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator